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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2019
TAGS: PARM PREL RS BA KU AE EG JO IS IR
SUBJECT: ACTION REQUEST: RUSSIA S-300 MISSILE TO IRAN

REF: MOSCOW 357

Classified By: NEA Acting A/S Jeffrey Feltman: Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) This is an action request for Posts in Abu Dhabi, Amman, Cairo, Kuwait City, Manama, and Riyadh. Please see para 7.

Summary and Background

¶2. (C) Posts are requested to raise with appropriate government officials our concerns about Russian plans to transfer the S-300 long-range air-defense system to Iran. Washington would like these governments to immediately and directly raise this issue with their Russian counterparts arguing that such a transfer could significantly enhance Iran's air defense capability; increase regional instability; and reward Iran at a time when Iran is undermining security with its nuclear pursuits and support for terrorism.

¶3. (S//NF) Over the past few years, the Russian Government has told the USG that, while it has a contract to supply the S-300 air-defense system to Iran, the transfer would not be completed until Iran complied with its international nuclear obligations. USG suspicions were piqued during a February 12 meeting when Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov brushed off U/S Burns concerns over such a transfer, but did not reiterate Russia's year-long position that the S-300 transfer depends on Iranian behavior. The Iranian Defense Minister is currently in Moscow for talks with Russia on the delivery of the S-300. Initial press reports quote Rosoboronexport officials as saying there has been no progress in the talks to expedite delivery of the system. Russian news media also speculates that Russia will not deliver the S-300 to Iran for fear of upsetting discussions with the new US administration.

Despite the denials in the press, we are concerned by the technical preparations for delivery of the S-300, which are complete or nearing completion. It appears that there is a need for action now to prevent a senior-level political decision to allow the delivery to go forward.

¶4. (C) Though Russia states that the S-300 is "defensive" in nature, the mobile system could be used to support offensive operations. S-300s located on Iranian territory would have the range to engage targets well beyond Iran's borders into Persian Gulf and Iraqi airspace, threatening U.S. and regional partners.

¶5. (SBU) UNSCR 1747, passed on March 24, 2007, urged all states to exercise "vigilance and restraint in the supply, sale or transfer" of a broad range of conventional weapons as defined for the purpose of the United Nations Register on

Conventional Arms to Iran. While the S-300 does not technically meet the definition within the UN Register for any of the categories of items listed in paragraph 6 of UNSCR 1747, transfers of this type of system to Iran seriously undercut the primary objective of UNSCR 1747 to further press Iran to comply with the UNSCR 1737 requirement to suspend its proliferation sensitive nuclear activities and cooperate fully with the IAEA.

¶6. (C) We have selected action addressee posts to engage the GOR because we maintain strong bilateral relationships and share common security interests, but also because we believe these governments have potential leverage with Russia. In particular, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have increased their political-military cooperation with Russia. These countries can legitimately make the point to Moscow that they cannot have a close political-military partnership with Russia, while Russia strengthens the hand of Iran, arguably the greatest threat to each of these nation's security.

Suggested Talking Points

¶7. (SBU) Posts are requested to approach appropriate host government officials regarding the possible transfer of the S-300 air-defense system from Russia to Iran. Post should draw from the following talking points.

--In the spirit of our bilateral cooperation, we request your government's support in urging Russia to not transfer a highly sophisticated air defense system to Iran.

--In 2005 Russia signed a contract to sell the modern long-range S-300 air defense missile system to Iran.

-- In 2006, after it was exposed that Iran was not in compliance with its international nuclear obligations, Russia assured us, it would not complete the transfer until Iran changed course.

--Despite these assurances, we are concerned that Russia is in a position to deliver the S-300 to Iran as soon as a political decision is taken.

--Moreover, when we raised our concerns in recent senior-level conversations with Russian officials, we were not reassured by the Russian response.

--We request that you use your influence with Russia to sharpen their decision against a transfer at this time.

--Though Russia has categorized the S-300 as defensive in nature, it is a mobile system that can easily used to support offensive operations.

--The most modern variant of the S-300, high-performance surface-to-air missile system would greatly improve Iran's ability to defend large regions of its airspace up to 200 km beyond its borders.

--With Iran in non-compliance of its international nuclear obligations and continued meddling in regional affairs, this is not the time for Russia to engage in arms sales with Tehran.

-- We are also concerned about the implications of the transfer of an air defense system to Iran. Such transfers would undercut the broad objective of UNSCR 1747 to increase pressure on Iran to suspend its proliferation sensitive nuclear activities and cooperate fully with the IAEA by denying arms transfers to Iran.

--(If appropriate) We believe you have particular leverage given your expanded military cooperation with Russia. You can legitimately argue that Moscow cannot be true partners in the political-military realm while simultaneously strengthening Iran, which is arguably the greatest threat to

your nation's security.

End Talking Points

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